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ABSTRACT

This handbook provides practical suggestions to principals on using teacher evaluation to develop a school's most important resource--its teachers. After briefly delineating the basic steps in teacher evaluation, the handbook provides advice in each of the following areas: formulating the approach; establishing an affirmative atmosphere; scheduling observations and conferences; and pre-evaluation conference; observing teachers in action; recording observations; analyzing the data; frequency of observation visits; announced visitations; providing feedback; the feedback conference; the setting; the conference agenda; the teacher's feedback; a sample plan of action for a teacher; getting a second (and third) opinion; checking progress; the culminating evaluation; the exceptional case (unacceptable performance); keeping the record straight; and looking ahead. Brief highlighted sections throughout the text provide succinct tips on observation and diagnosis, the extra dimension (or the global, high-inference qualities of effective teaching that eludes analytic evaluation techniques); the staff advisory council as a way of involving teachers in the evaluation process; and the summing-up phase (end-of-year assessments). (TE)

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Effective Teachers:

IN AMERICA'S ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
Serving Elementary and Middle School Principals

Effective Teachers:

Effective Evaluation

IN AMERICA'S ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Serving Elementary and Middle School Principals

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FOREWORD

As part of its focus on educational excellence, the National Association of Elementary School Principals conducted a two-phased study to identify the qualities that distinguish top-flight elementary and middle school education.

Phase I culminated in 1984 with the publication of *Standards for Quality Elementary Schools: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade*, a landmark analysis of what educational excellence looks like in practice. Phase II was completed in 1986 with the publication of *Proficiencies for Principals: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade*, a report of the skills, traits, and capabilities that characterize effective K-8 administrators.

The logical next step from identifying basic proficiencies is to provide practical suggestions on how to achieve them. This study focuses on perhaps the most sensitive and crucial of principal proficiencies—teacher evaluation.

NAESP's overriding goal is the best possible education for American children and youth, and we see teacher evaluation as a basic element in that goal's achievement. If evaluation is to fulfill its promise, however, it must be constructive in every sense—serving students by helping teachers to achieve their full potential, to take pride and satisfaction in their work, and to become first-rate professionals.

Dolores B. Hardison
President

Samuel G. Sava
Executive Director

Developing a School's Most Important Resource

Teacher evaluation is widely regarded as a negative proposition, on a par with a trip to the woodshed. Many principals as well as teachers still see the process in this context, perhaps because of past experience and perhaps more importantly because they fail to recognize evaluation for what it is: the necessary foundation for improved teacher performance and heightened satisfaction, and for the pride that comes from becoming really good at something.

Evaluation should aim at building on the foundation of skills the teacher already possesses.

Teacher evaluation is an invaluable administrative tool, the basic instrument in developing a school's most important resource—an expert teaching staff. For evaluation to achieve its potential, however, the principal must accept the proposition that all teachers are capable of becoming more effective and more professional, and that the great majority are eager to do so.

Experience confirms what research indicates—that most teachers (in the order of 95 percent or more) are competent and pose no problem. In most schools, very few—often none—are sufficiently below par to call for stringent action or perhaps dismissal. Logically, then, the evaluation process should be fashioned not to winnow out deadwood but to build on the foundation of skills that teachers already possess. Evaluation thus becomes a means of stimulating further professional growth, heightening teacher *esprit de corps*, and maintaining an able, enthusiastic staff.

Since most districts require an official indication by the principal of every teacher's level of performance, the evaluation process also involves some of the characteristics of a report card. The principal must officially state that performance is satisfactory or unsatisfactory; and if the latter, must consider moving toward a recommendation of dismissal. Now, that's pretty heavy stuff. A person's livelihood is involved. So, of course, is a proper education for the students.

Perhaps because the stakes are so high, it is this aspect of teacher evaluation—the possibility of dismissal—that has tended to give the process a bleak image. Yet, in reality, dismissal is so infrequently involved that this kind of performance rating might well be separated from the normal or standard evaluation addressed to helping teachers become more proficient, and in fact some districts have made them two separate functions.

Some Basic Steps

Whatever the arrangement, the basic goal of a sound teacher-evaluation program is to create a staff-wide concern for professional growth, and thanks to the leadership of proficient principals, that kind of attitude is becoming increasingly common in the nation's elementary and middle schools.

In such schools the evaluation process tends to entail certain basic steps, each deserving careful thought and review. They include the following:

- Developing an overall plan of how the evaluation is to proceed, with dates and times established for visitations and feedback conferences,

- Gathering relevant information—lesson plans and records of previous observations, for example.
- Observing the teacher in the classroom—*at least* twice annually on a formal basis, and informally as often as need may suggest,
- Analyzing these observations and other available data,
- Conducting feedback conferences,
- Developing, with the teacher, a plan for enhancing the teacher's effectiveness, and
- Assessing the teacher's performance for retention purposes.

Formulating the Approach

Recognizing that the basic goal is to improve teacher effectiveness (and not simply to give a rating), the principal should design an approach that acknowledges the valid techniques the teacher is using, considers the climate for learning that pervades the teacher's classroom, assesses the progress being made by the students, identifies alternate techniques and strategies the teacher would advisedly consider, notes ways in which the teacher could become more effective, and sketches out a program for fine-tuning extant skills and capabilities and reaching out for new ones.

It is important to involve the teachers in identifying the most important teacher proficiencies.

As a first step it is a good idea to check board of education policies, negotiated agreements, and state laws for any *required* proficiencies. It is definitely worthwhile also to review the professional literature on the subject. And it is important to involve the staff, here and in other aspects of the evaluating process. One especially useful activity, for example, is to arrange brainstorming sessions at which the staff identifies what they see as the most important teacher proficiencies.

This is the time to identify competencies that are considered so crucial that their absence would represent a major deficiency, and to make note of specific points to look for. For example, one of the stated competencies might be that "The teacher provides for student involvement." In this instance the principal might be alert to ways in which the teacher plans lessons so that they flow from what the students already know and are able to do, gives students choices of different kinds of learning activities, routinely asks students for their reactions and ideas, and encourages the students to analyze the instruction they are receiving and suggest how it might be strengthened.

A simple questionnaire that could be used to generate discussion between the teacher and the principal about such specifics is shown in Figure 1. (Please note that Figure 1 is only a sample and includes only one competency among many possible competencies.) One basic purpose of such a questionnaire is to lay the groundwork for a discussion between the teacher and the principal aimed at establishing mutual expectations and priorities. A secondary purpose is to give tangible evidence that the evaluation process is to be concerned with professional matters and conducted on a professional basis to serve professional purposes.

Having drafted a form that uses the Figure 1 approach to various competencies, the principal could meet with groups of teachers from particular departments or grade levels, have them complete the questionnaire, and then conduct an open discussion of their reactions and suggestions. Any differences should be thoroughly ironed out, and the result should be agreement on a clearly stated list of optimum teacher behaviors and practices, for circulation to every member of the professional staff. That there *be* such agreement is essential to good supervision, minimizing skewed communications when the evaluation and follow-up processes are under way.

Figure 1

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT (Teacher Questionnaire)

YES	NO	DO YOU ROUTINELY:
☐	☐	Involve students in planning and selecting learning activities?
☐	☐	Seek students' opinions about the effectiveness of particular learning activities?
☐	☐	Plan lessons in terms of what the students are expected to learn (as contrasted with content to be covered or material to be presented)?
☐	☐	Provide students with choices of learning activities?
☐	☐	
☐		

Establishing an Affirmative Atmosphere

This kind of collaboration is essential to the process of helping teachers overcome their apprehensions about evaluation and recognize it as a step toward greater success. The proficient principal is skillful in the field of human relations, and such skillfulness is nowhere more useful than in assuring that the evaluation experience always aims to be helpful and never destructive.

For that kind of atmosphere to be engendered it is imperative that the people being evaluated know "the game plan." They must understand the criteria upon which the evaluation will be based and, in fact, have a role in identifying those criteria. They must be told how often formal observations will be made and what matters will be considered. If informal "drop-in" observations are a possibility, they must know about that, too. And it is crucial that they understand the evaluator's expectations.

The evaluator's expectations should be high. Research has repeatedly shown that people tend to produce at the level of expectancy set for them by their leaders—in this instance, the principal. The expectations must, of course, be attainable, given suitable effort, and the staff must clearly understand what those expectations are—which suggests that they should be conveyed not only orally but in writing, and not just once but on several occasions.

It is a good idea to periodically go over evaluation purposes and procedures at staff meetings, seeking to clear up any questions, analyzing any evaluation forms that will be used, and discussing the kinds of notes that will be taken during an observation. Remind the teachers that all records pertaining to an individual's evaluation are open for that individual's inspection, and use every opportunity to emphasize that the procedure is geared toward improving the most crucial aspect of the school's operation—instruction—and toward serving the most crucial members of the instructional staff—the teachers.

Scheduling Observations and Conferences

Expectations and procedures having been established, the principal should draw up a schedule of classroom observations and conferences, with one formal visitation and conference to be conducted at the beginning of the school year, another toward the end, and others during the year as need and opportunity suggest. Block out periods of time each week that are to be reserved for visiting particular teachers' classrooms and for holding feedback conferences. Space the observations throughout the year so as not to set for yourself unreasonable or unattainable work loads in any one month, and leave time for any special observations that might become necessary.

Block out periods of time that are reserved for visitations and feedback conferences.

In drawing up the schedule, work backward. Take into account scheduled events, meetings, and deadlines established by the school board; convention dates; annual events at the school; and other possible conflicts. Allow ample time for unforeseen situations and the inevitable snafus. Schedule feedback conferences *within three school days* of the classroom visitation.

Once the observation times have been established, perhaps using a form something like Figure 2, inform your secretary and your supervisor. It is important that they do not make commitments for you that conflict with your observation and conference schedule.

Figure 2
SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS AND CONFERENCES

NAME OF TEACHER	NAME OF OBSERVER	VISITATION DATES	CONFERENCE DATES

The Pre-evaluation Conference

Prior to the start of the observation cycle, the principal should hold a pre-evaluation conference with each teacher. The "bookkeeping" reasons for such a meeting are to go over the procedures and purposes involved, to describe the nature and objectives of the teacher/principal conferences, and to clear up any questions. A more fundamental reason is to give the teachers an opportunity to discuss their philosophy as a teacher and to describe their short- and long-term goals. They should be asked to take time out every once in awhile during the year to reflect on their classroom performance, seeking to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and to consider how they might go about honing their skills.

Another fundamental purpose is to try to establish a nonthreatening atmosphere in regard to being evaluated. That is of course more easily said than done, and it certainly cannot be accomplished in a single session. One-to-one meetings make a considerable impact on teachers, but long-term trust and confidence must be built by day-to-day actions and attitudes.

Here are some suggestions for how to create that kind of relationship:

- Discuss evaluation openly and candidly; do not dissemble.
- Be able to clearly state the purpose of the evaluation process (write it down, if necessary) and do so frequently.
- Recognize that negative attitudes toward being evaluated may not only be honest and sincere but well-founded in past experience.
- Encourage teachers to "open up" about the causes of their negative feelings; encourage open-mindedness.
- Make the evaluation process collegial; involve the teacher staff in identifying good practice and poor practice, thus giving them a stake in the process's conduct and success.
- Adhere to established procedures—spring no surprises.
- Provide feedback promptly; don't leave the teacher hanging.
- Deliver on commitments; provide needed resources and assistance promptly.
- Make integrity a cornerstone of your actions; practice what you preach; build trust by example, rather than exhortation.
- Be patient and calm; it takes time to build understanding and trust.
- Remember that evaluation has two separate aspects—one for improvement of instruction and one for supervision—and be certain that the former remains dominant in your thinking and your planning.
- Make sure the teachers understand the specific levels of performance expected of them.

- Be prepared to supply sources of information and examples of good practice that teachers can turn to.
- Expect a lot, and be willing to give a lot.

Observation and Diagnosis

Observing teachers teaching is a diagnostic process.

Seeing the teacher in action in the classroom is a basic first step toward recognizing how well or poorly the teacher is going about his/her job. Observing serves little purpose, however, unless the principal analyzes what was observed and meets with the teacher in a feedback conference to discuss and clarify the teacher's intentions and the principal's expectations.

Against that background they can mutually diagnose any inefficiencies and agree on a program for dealing with them.

Observing Teachers in Action

The time has come for the first visitation to teachers in their classrooms—a major, sometimes scary event for the teacher and a demanding one for the principal as the school's instructional leader.

Having become familiar with the teacher's lesson plan, the principal will seek to:

- Identify areas in which the teacher clearly has strengths.
- Note exemplary practices that could be recommended to other teachers.
- Identify areas in which the teacher needs improvement.
- Identify areas in which the teacher needs additional material or administrative support.
- Determine the extent to which students are achieving established learning objectives.
- Establish whether school policies are being adhered to.
- Assess the adequacy and feasibility of school district policies and programs.

Recording Observations

Record facts; cite examples; give concrete evidence.

How and when should principals record information gleaned from the classroom visit?

Some make narrative notes. Some use checklists such as the one shown in Figure 3. Others prefer a combination of the two.

Still others say that record-making during the visitation should be avoided altogether—so that the teacher will not get distracted—with principals recording their findings only after they have returned to their offices. Experience suggests the following:

First, the matter of whether the principal will take notes should be fully discussed in the pre-observation conference between the teacher and the principal.

Second, the principal should by all means make an on-the-spot record of what was observed—by checklist or (preferably) by note-taking. Reasons: Too many diversions and distractions can beset principals making their way back to their offices, too many emergencies will await them there, and classroom visitations are too important to take chances with recording the findings.

The record should be of such a nature as to reveal how the teacher functions, not simply give impressions or judgments. That means facts, specifics, concrete data—supported by examples. It may not be possible to avoid making judgments altogether, but every effort should be made to do so, for judgments often fail to deliver a message that the teacher can put to practical use.

Principals should derive at least two things from a classroom visitation:

First, they should be able to reconstruct the lesson, including the sequence of instructional activities the teacher employed.

Second, they should be able to produce a record phrased in terms of specific behaviors—with concrete examples of what the teacher did and what the pupils did in return, and how well the class achieved stated objectives. Perhaps the most effective method of recording data is a written narration that gives an objective picture of exactly what is seen and heard by the observer in a specific amount of time. This record should cover an entire lesson, including transitions, and should portray precisely what the principal saw and heard. That portrayal should take into account each pupil's behavior, or at the very least the range of their reactions, within the context of the operations of the total class, and each activity of the teacher. Developing an accurate, specific, detailed picture is no small undertaking and requires the principal's intense concentration.

The goal is to gather solid, detailed evidence indicating how well the teacher is meeting established criteria and attaining expected levels of proficiency. It is worth keeping in mind that ultimately the principal's record may well be read not just by the principal and the individual teacher involved but perhaps by the principal's supervisor, or possibly the superintendent or a member of the school board, and maybe—if the principal's assessment is extremely negative—by an attorney preparing a lawsuit.

Summing up, the principal should:

- Record facts, not judgments or impressions.
- Cite examples of specific observed behavior.
- Give concrete evidence of achievement, or lack of it.
- Note progress by comparing performance with established standards and with performance noted in previous evaluations.

An important note: Do not leave the classroom without giving the teacher some feedback. For the immediate purpose a brief message on a 3 × 5 index card is enough—so long as it is positive and constructive. A more detailed reaction can come later.

Figure 3
VISITATION MATTERS TO BE ALERT FOR

YES	NO	NOT EVIDENT		YES	NO	NOT EVIDENT	
			DOES THE TEACHER:				**DOES THE TEACHER: continued**
☐	☐	☐	Teach to objectives?	☐	☐	☐	Manage the class efficiently?
☐	☐	☐	Relate teaching activities to those objectives?	☐	☐	☐	Handle behavior problems effectively?
☐	☐	☐	Observe accepted teaching-learning principles?	☐	☐	☐	Show evidence of being able to cope with unexpected problems?
☐	☐	☐	Show evidence of good subject-matter background?	☐	☐	☐	Show good taste in dress and manner?
☐	☐	☐	Monitor the extent to which students understand the lesson?	☐	☐	☐	Make understandable assignments?
☐	☐	☐	Relate today's lesson to previous ones?				
☐	☐	☐	Handle opening-of-class routines expeditiously?				**DO THE STUDENTS:**
☐	☐	☐	Have materials, supplies, and equipment ready for use?	☐	☐	☐	Show interest in the class?
☐	☐	☐	Use textbooks and related materials effectively?	☐	☐	☐	Appear to understand what is being taught?
☐	☐	☐	Make the subject matter interesting and meaningful?	☐	☐	☐	Show a cooperative attitude?
☐	☐	☐	Recognize all students when they wish to recite?	☐	☐	☐	Demonstrate positive behavior?
☐	☐	☐	Adapt instruction to the learning level of students?	☐	☐	☐	Ask thoughtful questions?
☐	☐	☐	Use teaching techniques which facilitate learning?				**ARE THE PHYSICAL FACILITIES:**
☐	☐	☐	Show consideration of the pupils' feelings?	☐	☐	☐	Conducive to learning?
☐	☐	☐	Respect the students' opinions and suggestions?	☐	☐	☐	Attractively arranged?
				☐	☐	☐	Well maintained?
				☐	☐	☐	Maintained so as to protect the health and safety of pupils?
				☐	☐	☐	Appropriate to the needs of teacher and pupils?

Analyzing the Data

The essential consideration is that the principal's reactions be constructive.

Having made it back to the office the principal will need to formalize the record made during the visitation—preferably having it typed—as a prelude to analyzing it in preparation for the first follow-up conference, to be held within no more than three days.

Depending on what took place in the classroom, the principal's assessment of various aspects of the teacher's performance will doubtless range from "exemplary" to "needs improvement" and perhaps in one or two cases it may descend to "has serious problems." The essential thing is that the reactions be constructive and not critical or carping, and that they bear on techniques and approaches and behaviors that merit reinforcement or alternatively need to be refined or possibly discarded—that they be *professional*. To say it once again, the main purpose of evaluation is not to rank teachers or determine which deserve gold stars, but to help individuals become more proficient.

That will entail exchanging ideas with teachers about how they might refine their skills and widen their horizons. Thus if any of the visitation data seem obscure or enigmatic, the principal would advisedly make a special drop-in visit to the classroom or have a conversation with the teacher or do whatever else it takes to acquire a clear picture before proceeding further.

Generally speaking, the principal's analysis should highlight such matters as these:

- How did the students react to the teacher's instruction, and how did the teacher react to their reaction?
- What recurring patterns were observed in the teacher's teaching style, and how did the students respond?
- What do the data indicate in regard to how well the teacher meets particular performance criteria?
- What specific areas of the teacher's performance should be reinforced and which are in need of refinement?
- How knowledgeable was the teacher about the subject matter involved, and how enthusiastic about it?
- What was the learning climate of the classroom—was it sparkling, or dull, or was it somewhere in between?
- Given the space to which the teacher was assigned, how attractive was the physical environment of the classroom?
- Did the students appear to have an affirmative attitude toward themselves and toward the teacher and other pupils?
- Would this teacher be a good model for other teachers?

The Extra Dimension

Important though classroom visitations and followup conferences are, the evaluation process should extend a bit beyond them. There will be those teachers who possess skills and qualities of character and attitudes that set them apart but may not be readily measured during a classroom visit—qualities such as

- A strong sense of the purposes of learning and a commitment to helping children progress,
- A warm, caring personality, with a special concern for young people,
- An ability to get along with other members of the staff and a keen interest in their welfare,
- An established record of academic excellence,
- The clear respect of colleagues,
- A wide repertoire of instructional techniques, and
- A sustained commitment to improvement.

Such attributes as these are invaluable, and they need to be reflected in the evaluation of the teachers who possess them. Upon observing them during the year the principal would do well to make a note for the teacher's file and then incorporate this information in the end-of-the-year evaluation.

How Many Observation Visits?

Principals should plan to make at least two formal observations during the year—perhaps more in special cases—plus as many informal observations as circumstances suggest.

With teachers who have long since demonstrated that they are first-rate, one formal visit may conceivably be sufficient. Do not assume, however, that formal observations may be skipped altogether. Teachers appreciate receiving the principal's one-on-one attention, take pride in their work, and would feel slighted if their classrooms were omitted from the schedule.

With teachers who show signs of struggling a bit, several formal observations may be called for, plus some drop-in visits, though the principal must be careful not to appear to be harassing the teacher.

Announced Visitations

Formal observations should last the full period and should be arranged ahead of time. There are those who argue that formal observation visits should *not* be made known in advance but rather occur unannounced, "so that the principal sees a typical performance." Aside from the fact that there is no guarantee that the principal will have happened to choose a "typical" day, the unannounced visit is likely to create such commotion—not just with the teacher but with the pupils as well—that the exercise would be robbed of much of its value.

Informal visits may last for as short a time as five to ten minutes and need not be scheduled—though it is crucial that the teachers be made aware in staff meetings and pre-evaluation conferences that unannounced drop-ins may occur.

Normally, the observation is made by the principal, alone. On occasion, however, this responsibility may be assigned to an assistant principal or a supervisor from the district staff, or such a person may accompany the principal (keeping in mind that having two observers risks creating a distraction and that having more than two would probably guarantee it). The observation visit aside, principals may often benefit from consulting with colleagues on the district staff, especially in troublesome cases.

Saying it once again, the business of the visitation is to observe needs and abilities, not to rate performance. Not everyone seems capable of making that distinction; some people invariably equate "need" with "weakness." The principal would be advised to be wary of getting such people involved in the observation phase of the evaluation process.

Toward Providing Feedback

The next step is for the principal to analyze the information gathered during the classroom visit in preparation for the first of two (or more) teacher/principal feedback conferences. Such conferences are essential and should take place within three school days after the principal has observed the teacher in action. Their purpose is to apply the insights of an expert (the principal) toward helping the teacher become more effective and more fulfilled. In preparing to carry out that role, the principal would advisedly undertake the following:

Feedback conferences, held within three days of visitations, are essential.

- Summarize the purpose for the conference.
- Write down the messages the teacher is to receive from the conference—general, summative statements plus particular suggestions and comments tied to particular matters the principal observed.
- Develop a rationale for each of the statements and comments to be made, explaining the reasons behind them. Refer to specific actions and techniques and events that were observed, and perhaps note relevant research findings or other authority regarding good practice. These matters also should be written down.
- Supply a copy of the critique to the teacher prior to the feedback conference. Most principals could doubtless ad lib this report, but it is important to have a tangible record and to share it with the teacher, especially if there are any reservations about the teacher's competence. It is important to always have a written record of the issues addressed at the conference and the conclusions reached.

- Decide on a way to record the teacher's concurrence with your observations and comments—or at the very least an indication that the teacher *understood* those comments and the reasons behind them—perhaps by initialing the pages. It is fundamental that the teacher grasp the intent and implications of the principal's observations so that they can work together to plan the next steps.
- Be prepared to discuss some activities the teacher might undertake toward overcoming deficiencies and building upon strengths.

The Staff Advisory Council

Teacher evaluation is most likely to achieve its purposes and enjoy schoolwide support if the teachers themselves are deeply involved in the process—through a Staff Advisory Council.

Initially the eight-to-twelve members of this body are appointed by the principal, seeking to select teachers widely regarded as being among the school's best. Thereafter, replacement members to fill vacancies are chosen by the principal from a slate submitted by the council. Members of the council are selected for one-year, two-year, and three-year terms, and may serve as many terms as seems useful.

Although the Advisory Council may perform many functions, its primary role is to provide advice and assistance to the principal in various aspects of the evaluation process and to help manage the program. Under the direction of a chairperson chosen by its members, the council meets at least monthly with the principal, schedules additional meetings if the need arises, and forms task forces to undertake special assignments.

Particular activities of the council could include:

- Taking the lead in formulating a list of criteria by which teacher performance may be evaluated;
- Arranging for teacher input (perhaps through brainstorming sessions) in identifying the most important teacher proficiencies;
- Creating and maintaining an inventory of especially effective teaching strategies and approaches;
- Developing a system of awards (pins are a possibility) for teachers who complete a certain number of self-improvement projects;
- Informing the media of the program and of the accomplishments of individual teachers;
- Providing best-practice demonstrations for the staff;
- Developing ideas for self-improvement projects that teachers might consider;
- Providing one-on-one counsel to teachers seeking advice;
- Developing model survey questions that teachers can draw upon in preparing student and parent polls.

The Feedback Conference

Many teachers and perhaps some principals may approach the feedback conference with a degree of trepidation. No matter how much assurance has been given teachers about the constructive nature and purposes of these sessions, some will be on the defensive, assuming they are about to be lectured at. And there will be principals who, having observed certain shortcomings, will dislike the prospect of having to confront a teacher with less than complimentary comments.

However, neither of these reactions is characteristic of an effectively conducted evaluation. The difference lies in the atmosphere the principal creates and, above all, in the attitude the principal displays. It is not always what principals *say* that makes teachers tighten up, but the way some say it. There is a a big difference between receiving carefully considered, constructive suggestions from a senior colleague and being chewed out by the boss—not to speak of a different tone of voice and a different manner and look.

The role of the principal is that of a friendly mentor. Mutual candor and trust cannot be developed overnight, of course—the principal must work on *that* throughout the year. There could be no better measure of progress in this regard than the spirit that marks the feedback conferences.

The Setting

An air of collegiality can to an important degree be imparted by the setting. While the meeting may very well be held in either the principal's office or the teacher's classroom, the principal should not be seated behind a desk. Desks, particularly the boss's desk, are regarded as signaling coldness and implacability.

Make the feedback conference a collegial and collaborative situation.

This is a collaborative situation, and teacher and principal should be seated in such a way—perhaps in easy chairs, or over a cup of coffee—as to show that they are meeting as colleagues to address matters of mutual professional interest.

There must be absolutely no interruption. The principal must accept no telephone calls during the conference, and the secretary should deliver no messages or mail. Any interruption will destroy the spirit being sought to create and convince the teacher that the principal actually attaches little importance to the conference, or for that matter, to the teacher.

The principal must be on guard not to dominate the conversation. Given the usual teacher apprehensions and the fact that it is the principal's observations that the teacher is most concerned with, that may require some dexterity on the principal's part. Whatever, it is important that the teachers have ample opportunity to speak up and are encouraged to do so, for in the long run it is they who must take charge of their own progress. Improvement cannot be imposed.

The Conference Agenda

No point should be left until the teacher understands its message.

The principal should try to manage matters so that the conference is over within an hour, though no teacher should be cut off if the situation seems to call for a bit more discussion. Within that hour the principal should:

- Review expectations,
- Ask the teacher to self-evaluate his or her performance,
- Discuss the principal's classroom observations,
- Review the file from any previous observations and conferences, including followup suggestions,
- Discuss the teacher's strengths,
- Discuss areas needing improvement,
- Agree on what the teacher is to do as a result of the conference, and
- Restate expectations.

The general goal is to reach closure on two basic propositions: (a) the cogency of the principal's observations and (b) one to three activities or projects the teacher will undertake toward becoming more proficient as a professional.

The principal should lead off with a *brief* summary of the purpose of the conference, the procedures to be followed, and a review of the observation notes before launching into a detailed give-and-take with the teacher.

The agenda entails going over each of the main points the principal wants to cite, one point at a time. No point should be left until the teacher indicates that she or he understands its message. A well-designed critique by the principal should cover no more than ten points—and preferably only six or seven, even if something must be put aside for the moment and perhaps saved for a later occasion.

Chances are that about half of the six-to-ten points the principal chooses to emphasize will bear on teacher successes—practices and strategies that helped the pupils to progress. Chances are, also, that the principal will have observed some practices and techniques that need to be improved upon or that were not as effective as others the principal could recommend.

And from time to time the principal will be dealing with a teacher who just doesn't cut it. These are special cases, calling for special treatment, and will be touched upon later. Meanwhile, let's keep the focus on the more typical teachers—the 95 percent who perform acceptably.

The Teacher's Feedback

While the immediate business at hand has to do with the classroom observations made by the principal, the teachers were there, too. They will have some reactions to the principal's observations, of course—some ideas to advance and some comments they would like to make, including the results of their own self-evaluation. It is crucial that they be given every opportunity to express themselves—the reason they did *this* in this particular situation, what they had in mind when they did *that*, what they were trying to accomplish and why, and perhaps certain changes and innovations they would like to suggest.

It is crucial that the teachers have ample opportunity to express themselves.

One important purpose in this give-and-take is to afford teachers ample opportunity to speak their minds. A second, more practical purpose is for the teacher and principal to analyze together the teacher's classroom performance and to work out ways to reinforce good practice, strengthen instructional methods that need improvement, learn of more effective approaches, be made aware of advances in instructional techniques and strategies, and in general to become more successful and fulfilled.

These purposes are so important to the teacher's future that there must be no game-playing connected with them. They call for complete honesty and candor—and friendly respect—on both sides. The principal must be generous in noting strengths and not only forthright in identifying defects in performance but sensitive to the impact of the manner in which these matters are expressed . . . capable of explaining in constructive, nonthreatening language the effect of particular flawed practices . . . and prepared to suggest how the situation could be straightened out. The teacher, meanwhile, must be truly interested in professional growth . . . aware that there is always room for improvement . . . and interested in capitalizing on the friendly counsel of an expert.

A Teacher Plan of Action

Since evaluation is seen primarily as a vehicle for enhancing teaching performance, a basic part of the feedback conference agenda is to explore ways by which the individual teacher can grow and develop.

Based on that discussion, each teacher is called upon to submit a plan of action citing activities or projects to be undertaken during the current school year. These can be generalized in nature—arranging to watch a master teacher at work, for example, or taking part in a seminar dealing with innovative teaching techniques or teaming up with another teacher for mutual observation-critique sessions. Or they can focus on one particular item, as for example, undertaking to become more skillful in getting more students involved in class activities.

Figure 4 is an example of the latter, and it is also an example of a form used in some places (in this case by a district in the state of Maryland) to focus self-improvement activities on specific targets.

For more generalized projects, a number of very interesting possibilities are presented in Figure 5, and the principal might well form a special committee of teachers to develop more.

The action plan should be developed by the teacher in close consultation with the principal and submitted within two weeks after the feedback conference. It should contain four components:

1. The areas of improvement the teacher will work on with the objectives specifically cited;
2. The specific strategies by which the objectives will be achieved;
3. The kind of evidence that will indicate appropriate progress; and
4. The anticipated completion date of each project.

Figure 4
WORKSHEET FOR DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES

Instruction: Each evaluatee, in cooperation with the evaluator, will develop objectives and identify ways to achieve and evaluate them. Use this form as a work sheet at the time of evaluation.

State objectives	Describe how you will attempt to attain them	Describe anticipated evidence of attainment	Determine how well the objective was attained and why
To involve increasing numbers of students in class activities	1. Limit the amount of talking I do to and with the whole class 2. Plan student-centered activities which involve all students (not just having one student report to the rest) 3. Use questionnaires and conferences to find out student interests, and plan around those interests 4. Let students suggest and carry out ways to show achievement of course objectives	Analysis of a tape of social studies instruction (recorded every other Wednesday) will show a decrease in teacher talk as the year progresses Analysis of my weekly plans (for one week each month) will show an increase in student-centered activities Analysis of student questionnaires will show a majority of the students feel that (a) activities are related to their interests (b) they do help to make some plans for the class (c) the teacher lets them choose what they want to do to show her they know things.	

Initials and Dates			
Original Approval		Final Review	
Evaluatee	Evaluator	Evaluatee	Evaluator

The objectives involved could cover schoolwide priorities, specific individual needs perceived by the teacher or the principal, or improvements needed in particular classes or with particular subjects. The principal is responsible for assuring that the proposed activities are in fact job-related and constructive, and if need be, for suggesting alternative projects. While no written reports are expected, the teachers are invited to describe their projects at staff meetings, and of course, their action-plan activities become a major subject of discussion at the windup teacher/principal feedback conference near the end of the school year.

Figure 5

SELF-IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS WORTH CONSIDERING

(Note: This list is illustrative of the kinds of activities the principal might recommend for helping members of the staff hone their skills and broaden their horizons.)

- Observe outstanding members of the staff to see how they do it.
- Agree to serve as a demonstration teacher to help colleagues improve their performance.
- Become an authority on some particular aspect of teaching—the use of "clinical instructional techniques," for example.
- Engage in related work experience outside the classroom—in "the world of work."
- Participate in rap sessions with colleagues regarding teaching problems or situations, perhaps forming a club for this purpose.
- Take specialized training in some aspect of the instructional process to acquire particular skills.
- Arrange for a videotape of one's own performance to diagnose strengths and weaknesses.
- Help form a group that engages in simulation activities and critiques the results.
- Become expert in the use of audiovisual materials or computer graphics or some other aspect of technology.
- Take related graduate school course work.
- Participate in inservice workshops related to areas of needed improvement.
- Consult with colleagues or specialists for advice and counsel on how to improve a particular shortcoming or dig deeper into a particular subject.
- Participate in encounter sessions to gain new insights about interpersonal relationships.
- Undertake a research project.
- Contribute articles to education publications.
- Develop media materials for use in the classroom or inservice activities.
- Engage in independent study.
- Seek out opportunities to take on leadership (program participant) assignments in a conference or seminar or workshop.
- Volunteer to serve as faculty advisor for a student club or activity and become the world's leading expert in whatever area the club covers.
- Arrange observation visits to master teachers in other schools.
- Organize a discussion group in which the participants read, and then exchange views about, leading books concerning particular aspects of the teacher's job.
- Become a volunteer with a community group whose purposes relate to your teaching assignment.
- Research the "quality circle" concept and take the lead in organizing one.

Especially with teachers who may be struggling a bit, the principal should make occasional progress checks on how the projects are working out and if necessary counsel the teacher on developing an amended plan.

Professional goal setting is not a complex affair—simply an arrangement by which every member of the professional staff, including the principal, decides to undertake from one to three activities each year that are expressly designed to correct immediate performance deficiencies or advance long-term career goals, and in general to enhance the person's professional proficiency.

Getting a Second (and Third) Opinion

In preparing to design their self-improvement activities, the teachers might be encouraged to reach beyond the principal's appraisal and adopt a technique that large companies employ toward improving customer acceptance of their products—a poll. In this case, two polls—addressed to two different groups of "customers": students and parents.

Responsibility for designing and conducting these polls should rest with the individual teachers, and the teaching staff might well form teams to draw up a couple of basic models.

Figure 6

STUDENT INPUT CHECKLIST

(This is a checklist to guide teachers and principals in designing questionnaires to obtain students' viewpoints.)

YES	NO	DOES THE QUESTIONNAIRE:
☐	☐	Use words within the comprehension level of the students?
☐	☐	Stress items about which students may have informed opinions?
		Deal with such matters as:
☐	☐	Class behavior and discipline?
☐	☐	Homework?
☐	☐	Grades and grading?
☐	☐	Teacher-student relationships?
☐	☐	Like or dislike of school?
☐	☐	Student participation in planning instructional activities?
☐	☐	Individualization of instructional activities?
☐	☐	Attendance?
☐	☐	Ask the student to identify difficulties encountered in school?
☐	☐	Ask the student to indicate easy things in schoolwork?
☐	☐	Request the student to suggest ways to improve classwork?
☐	☐	Ask the student to cite what is most liked about school?
☐	☐	Ask the student to cite what is least liked about school?

Teachers should be encouraged to find out what the "customers" think.

In both the student and parent polls, the polling instruments should be brief, uncomplicated, and to the point. They should pose no more than 12 questions, and the majority of these questions should be answerable simply by a "yes" or "no" (to encourage a greater response).

With the student poll, the questions should be framed in such a way as to reveal which aspects of the class the students find most interesting and which least interesting, and what there is about the teacher's instructional style and technique they find most—or least—stimulating.

With the parent poll it would be useful to know what reactions the pupils bring home—what they talk negatively about and what they enjoy—and what the parents would suggest that might make the instructional process more fruitful. Students and parents responding to these questionnaires are of course to do so anonymously.

Particularly with the student poll, individual teachers may want to tailor their questionnaires to their individual situations. However, a basic format for both questionnaires should be developed by a teacher task force and be reviewed and discussed at staff meetings.

Figures 6 and 7 contain checklists that might be used to assure that these questionnaires accomplish what they were intended to accomplish and provide useful and relevant information.

Figure 7

PARENT INPUT CHECKLIST

(This is a checklist to guide teachers and principals in designing questionnaires to obtain parents' viewpoints.)

YES	NO	
		DOES THE QUESTIONNAIRE:
☐	☐	Ask questions to which parents are in a position to give responsible answers?
☐	☐	Deal with matters that are likely to be of interest to parents?
		Include such matters as:
☐	☐	Student behavior and discipline?
☐	☐	Kind and amount of homework?
☐	☐	Grades and grading?
☐	☐	Parent-teacher conferences?
☐	☐	Student attitudes toward school?
☐	☐	Student attendance?
☐	☐	Teacher-student relationships?
☐	☐	Ask parents to indicate how well students are doing in school?
☐	☐	Ask parents to identify special concerns they may have about their child's work?
☐	☐	Invite parents to suggest ways to improve school experiences for students?

Checking Progress

With the principal and the teacher having gone over the principal's comments and suggestions, and with the teacher now developing an action plan for self-improvement, it is important that the principal take time to review how well the first round in the visitation/feedback conference process came off:

Take time to review how well the first round in the process came off.

- Did the conference include all the planned elements? Were any inadvertently omitted?
- Did the format prove effective? Are any modifications called for?
- Was the appropriate atmosphere achieved?
- Was there any point or procedure that should have been added?
- Any that should have been omitted?
- Were the objectives achieved? If not, why?
- Was anything unintended accomplished that might be incorporated into future visitation/feedback conference experiences?
- If you could do this particular visitation/conference again, what, if anything, would you do differently?

On the basis of this kind of analysis, the principal should prepare a written summary of the conference for the file and for sharing with the teacher. Then, in wrapping things up, the principal must follow through on providing any training resources or special support or materials mentioned during the conference; don't be all talk and no action. And keep in mind that monitoring the progress of the teacher's self-improvement action plan is a continuing responsibility.

The Culminating Evaluation

The culminating principal/teacher feedback conference—in many cases it is the second—is scheduled near the end of the year and differs from the first in two ways: first, it takes into account all evaluation data gathered during the year; and second, a formal, written rating is involved. Most school systems require that such ratings be made at certain specified times—once a year perhaps, or maybe once every three years. Required though it may be, however, the rating should not be allowed to divert attention from the basic evaluation goal of helping teachers become ever more skillful. The key element in avoiding that pitfall is the principal's attitude and demeanor—whether the principal comes on as friendly, constructive colleague or mentor, or as fault-finding drill sergeant.

As with all conferences, the culminating conference occurs within three days after a formal classroom visitation. It is concerned among other things with reviewing the findings of this and all previous visitations . . . reinforcing progress . . . discussing any concerns postponed from the first conference . . .

reviewing the results of the teacher's action plan for self-improvement . . . and discussing possible improvement activities the teacher might pursue during the next school year.

The principal should draw up an outline of matters to be covered, and in what sequence, and should have prepared a written report of observations and suggestions for sharing with the teacher. The basic ground rules still pertain: There must be no interruptions. The teacher must be given ample opportunity to speak up. And the principal's comments should relate to specific teacher behaviors and approaches, and not consist simply of impressions.

Subjective judgments doubtless cannot be avoided altogether, since some important aspects of teaching are simply not quantifiable. It is important, nonetheless, that the principal make a vigorous effort to do so, and in any event, to gather data that support any such judgments. Teachers have a right to know the bases on which judgments were made—favorable or unfavorable. They are not going to learn unless they understand the principal's thinking and reasoning.

Having in mind both the level of performance and how well the teacher is moving toward even greater proficiency, the principal should seek to assign a rating that will provide a useful signal of the level of professional progress. And with the rating should come a sincere, honest explanation of the reasons behind it. This a valuable opportunity for the principal to instill pride in achievement and commitment to excellence.

The Exceptional Case

Most end-of-the-year assessments will be favorable. Most teachers will rate at least a satisfactory rating, and some of those who do not may well prove capable of succeeding if they are willing to make the effort.

Occasionally there will be teachers whose performance is not acceptable.

From time to time there will be teachers whose performance is simply not acceptable. In those cases, as with competent teachers, principals must not lose sight of their responsibilities either to the students and the taxpayers, or to the individual human being involved. For the former, that means taking whatever steps prove necessary to assure that incompetent teachers either become competent or leave the classroom. For the latter—the member of the staff whose performance is found to be unacceptable—the need is for firm, constructive action but never scorn. Some very fine people are not up to the demands of being a good teacher.

As with all other teachers, the principal is in these cases called upon to be genial, gracious, and open. It is crucial that there be no air of condemnation or vituperation. Being incompetent as a teacher is not the same thing as being evil. Moreover, there must be no opening for the teacher to feel—and later argue—that the issue was not professional inability but personal dislike.

Here are some suggestions:

- Act on a problem or deficiency as soon as it is spotted; do not let it become more ingrained—and thus implicitly accepted.

- Meet with the teacher and explain the particular problem or problems; explicitly state which specific practices or behaviors are unacceptable and why.
- Indicate the applicable approaches, behaviors, and strategies that are recognized as good practice in the school and school district.
- Suggest specific activities the individual could undertake to overcome the difficulties.
- Determine, with the teacher, any special help and/or materials the school might provide to help remedy the situation.
- Follow through to make certain the teacher receives this assistance (thus avoiding any later claim that the school was at fault rather than the teacher).
- Regularly monitor the teacher's performance and provide advice and counsel as the situation indicates. Such attention must be essentially the same, even if more intense, as that paid to other teachers; the teacher must not be given grounds for feeling he/she was the object of a vendetta.
- Assemble specific evidence for every element of the assessment. "Telling it like it is" is easier said than done. There must be facts to point to, reasons, explanations the teacher can readily grasp and see the logic of.

The Summing Up

End-of-year assessments are an integral element in transition to the next exhilarating phase of the teacher's career.

In reflecting the evaluative data collected during the year—the critiques of classroom visitations, the teacher's self-assessments and comments, the notes of the feedback conferences, the record of the teacher's self-improvement activities—these assessments should not only disclose progress toward fulfilling performance objectives: They should also suggest next steps for the teacher to take in the arduous but gratifying journey toward becoming a truly expert, fulfilled professional.

Keeping the Record Straight

Above all, *document every contact* with the teacher. Maintain a file (not only for this teacher but all other staff members you are called upon to rate). Include specific matters observed, assistance and counsel offered, and responses by the teacher. You cannot be too meticulous in keeping such a record, for conceivably you could find yourself defending your treatment of the teacher before a review board or even a judge hearing a lawsuit brought against you.

The file on a teacher with problems should in effect be the same kind of record developed for other teachers in connection with feedback conferences (again, so that you cannot be accused of having singled out this teacher for punishment). Such a file would, of course, include data from all observations and follow-up conferences as well as conference notes and letters about the teacher.

In all cases try to identify—and call attention to—positive as well as negative practices or behaviors, and in concert with the teacher try to identify one to three self-improvement activities the teacher would advisedly undertake. Depending on the teacher's feelings in the matter, you might arrange for special counsel from a master teacher.

As with other teachers, share the records. Do not hide anything, and do not leave the teacher in any doubt as to what the specific problems are and what standards they are expected to meet. And you would do well to have the teacher initial all materials as a record of having seen them.

Finally, if nothing works and you have concluded that action leading toward dismissal is called for, move carefully but decisively and without shilly-shallying. Firing someone is just about as unpleasant a chore as the principal gets, but the situation is too important to allow time for fainthearted irresolution.

Looking Ahead

Are the teachers becoming more skillful, more able, more interested in excellence?

The culminating cycle of the evaluation procedure having been completed, it is time to think about the next school year and perhaps to start working on a schedule of visitations and feedback conferences. Before doing so, however, the principal would do well to take time to reflect on how the process has been working out and how it might be improved.

Was every teacher observed at least twice and is there a complete record of all observations? Were all feedback conferences held within three days of the classroom visitations? Were they properly organized? Were strengths in the teachers' performance stressed at least as fully as any weaknesses? Were there any problems in compiling a definitive critique for each teacher?

Do the teachers seem to be losing their apprehensions about evaluation and beginning to see it as a foundation for professional progress?

Are the self-improvement action plans clearly producing good results, or does this concept need further thought? Are the suggested activities or projects sufficiently helpful? Has action been launched to help or terminate teachers who do not meet required levels of competency?

Above all, are the teachers becoming more skillful, more able, more interested in excellence . . . are they growing?

It would be useful to know what the teachers themselves think. Asking them at the windup conference might be embarrassing and in any case unlikely to produce candid answers. A poll might be a good idea, though—conducted anonymously, of course. Perhaps each teacher could be asked to fill out a questionnaire something like the one in Figure 8.

With this information and with the cooperation and assistance of a teacher advisory council, the principal can start working toward making next year's evaluation experience even better than this year's, and the one after that better still.

Figure 8

TEACHER PERCEPTION INVENTORY

(This questionnaire seeks to help the principal improve the evaluation experience by polling teacher reactions.)

Which of the following most nearly reflected your anticipations about the feedback conference *before* the conference took place:

- ☐ Felt apprehensive
- ☐ Was curious about what would occur
- ☐ Had no particular feeling about it
- ☐ Had a good idea what it would be like
- ☐ Had no apprehension about it
- ☐ Other (specify): _____

When the conference was over, which of the following best describes your feelings about it?

- ☐ Felt uneasy and on the defensive
- ☐ Did not feel I had learned anything
- ☐ Had neither a negative nor a positive feeling
- ☐ Felt the conference was helpful
- ☐ Felt motivated to acquire new skills
- ☐ Welcomed an opportunity to learn of my strengths and weaknesses

(Directions: Please check the response that best indicates your view of the overall evaluation experience.)

YES	SOMEWHAT	NO	UNCERTAIN	
☐	☐	☐	☐	Were the assessments of your performance objective and fair?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Was the feedback conference held in a comfortable setting?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Was the atmosphere nonthreatening?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Did you have ample opportunity to express your feelings and reactions?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Was criticism given constructively?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Was praise given honestly and sincerely?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Did you feel put down during the conference?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Do you feel the assessment experience was helpful to you?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Do you feel you are embarked on a program that will help you become a better and more satisfied teacher?

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